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TO : Department of State
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EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: GT, PINS, SHUM, POBS

FROM : Amembassy GUATEMALA

DATE: March 22, 1977

SUBJECT: Monthly Report on Political Violence and Human Rights: February 1977

REF :

SUMMARY: In a month devoid of "spectaculars", the total number of incidents of probable political violence dropped to 23 in February. It now appears that the lull in incidents of political violence over the past few months is continuing. The EGP was relatively quiet and is credited with only eight incidents of sugarcane burning on the south coast. END SUMMARY.

With the number of press-reported incidents of probable political violence falling to 23 in February, it now appears that the concern expressed in last month's report that January's 29 incidents presaged a possible close to the year-end lull in incidents of violence may have been premature. Instead February became the fifth successive month in which the number of incidents remained below 30. A look at the enclosed chart leaves the impression that following the turbulent middle months of 1976, when on three occasions the number of incidents rose into the 40's, we may again be in a period of lower levels of violence such as prevailed from February 1975 to March 1976. However, with national elections less than a year away this picture could change quickly.

The 23 incidents in February included ten murders, four kidnappings, one unsuccessful armed attack and eight incidents of burning. The burnings require an explanatory note because the selection of the number "eight" was somewhat arbitrary. The series of sugarcane burnings on the south coast, mentioned in the January report, continued into

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Drafted by
POL:RES:mjf
Clearances
POL:GF Jones

POL-I:WETHomas

Contents and Classification Approved by:
DCM:GRANDREWS
DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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February and even increased from 20 last month to 26 this month. Since the EGP in a January press release claimed credit for six of the 30 burnings in January (30%) it is reasonable to assume that they were responsible for some of February's 26 burnings. Since, however, they have not this month publicized their activities, we have credited them with the same percentage this month, 30%, or eight incidents of burning. The other burnings are presumed to be the work of non-political arson, accidents and owner-instigated fires.

Of the eight murders in February one is worth recounting in some detail because it is rare that this much information on an apparently political murder comes to light. Following the disappearance of a man in Chiquimula, long an MLN stronghold, the police picked up an individual who admitted having been involved in the kidnapping. The kidnapper explained that the kidnapped man had been offered \$100 by a local MLN leader and military commissioner to kill the local mayor, a member of the Democratic Institutional Party (PID), but he refused. The MLN leader then ordered his kidnapping and murder for refusing to murder the mayor. COMMENT: The incident, while devoid of national significance, nevertheless illustrates (1) how relations have deteriorated between the erstwhile government coalition partners, and (2) the increased unwillingness of the GOG and local police authorities to overlook MLN-perpetrated murders. END COMMENT.

All this month's incidents took place in either Guatemala Department (four killings and four kidnappings), the eastern departments around Chiquimula (five killings and one unsuccessful assassination attempt) or the south coast (one killing and eight burnings). There were no known incidents in El Quiché.

Not included in this month's statistics but of interest nonetheless is a press report out of Honduras that Guatemala guerrillas operating near the Honduras border in Chiquimula have killed at least five Hondurans in border raids. Since it is known that an EGP group is operating in that general area the report is plausible.

As a final note engineer Juan Jose Hermosilla (see January report) was released safe and unhurt on March 8 by the EGP after having been kidnapped for 72 days. It is not known how much if any ransom was paid by his family.

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